2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

438 The many little shops
443 scattered about the village permit the women to do most of their
512 shopping near their own homes. Because of the long, hot summers
621 when food spoils quickly, they shop separately for each meal.
[251] Their shopping trips begin on the way home from the early Mass,
[796] at about 4.30 or 5 o'clock in the morning, and continue until 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. Thus, during the course of a day, a woman may make as many as a dozen trips to the shops as well as to the hawkers who pass through the neighbourhood. These trips are social occasions during which she comes in contact with friends and neighbours from all parts of the village, and in the process hears the village news.

278 The men are out of the village from 6 o'clock or so in the
512 morning to about 2 o'clock in the afternoon in the summer, and
517 in the winter from about 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning to 5 o'clock
621 in the evening. But summer or winter, in the late afternoon and the early evening the men gather in the clubs, wine shops and cafés. Besides the clubs and important cafés in the square, which draw men from all over the village, there are many small neighbourhood wine shops. Most have a regular clientele of friends and neighbours who spend hours together talking, playing cards and drinking tea, soft drinks or wine. Many cafés also have television. Thus, though most inhabitants of a village are in fairly frequent contact with each other, the gossip groups of the women and the wine shops of the men form local social centres which help bind neighbours more closely to one another. These neighbourhoods develop a certain group loyalty.

621 It often happens that some of the neighbourhoods in a town or
794 village are centred on small chapels. In times gone by there used
796 to be a certain amount of good-natured competition between the youngsters of these districts over the festas of the patron saints of their respective chapels. But, except on rare occasions, this rivalry never threatened the unity of the village during the annual festa of the patron saint of the parish. Frequent removals from house to house within the village have usually helped to prevent the development of disruptive sectional loyalties.

621 Since each village is also a separate parish it is not possible to
[771] consider a village entirely as a secular community. Religion per-
[794] meates the structure of Maltese society to an extent that makes it quite impossible to classify many institutions as either religious or secular. As a secular community, a village has no official leader, it

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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[p.120]

CHAPTER VIII

The Village and the Outside World

Every Maltese is at the centre of a large network of kin relations. Thus, when the need arises, many people are able to move along the intricate channels of consanguinity and affinity to establish personal contact with influential persons. It has also been noted that this network of kin can be extended artificially. Important persons, such as politicians, police officers, high civil servants and professionals are often invited to become godparents, marriage witnesses and confirmation sponsors. These relationships are constantly manipulated to bring individuals in touch with decision makers. This gives a personal content to many official decisions. Since most people honour the obligations of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood, requests which appeal to these values stand a good chance of a favourable reply. But a large network of kinsmen can also be a liability to a civil servant, for the favourable treatment he is expected to give a kinsman often conflicts with the civil service ethic of impartiality. This can place persons in authority in awkward positions, since the refusal of a request may seriously affect either their personal relations or their professional integrity. Maltese civil servants thus work under pressure which is quite unfamiliar to their counterparts in larger, less intimately related societies.

II

Another method of handling contacts with authority is through influential patrons. By 'patron' I mean a person who uses his influence to assist and protect some other person, who then becomes his 'client'. In a Catholic society there is a strong ideological basis for a system of patronage, for there is great similarity between the function of saints and mortal patrons. Michael Kenny points to this correspondence in his study of patronage in Spain[1] and, in general terms, his analysis is equally applicable to

[1] 'Patterns of Patronage in Spain', *Anthropological Quarterly*, XXXIII (January 1960), pp. 14–23.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Malta. He sees the patronage system in Spain as a pyramidal structure incorporating both the natural and the spiritual worlds. At the top is God, the supreme patron who is not dependent upon anyone. At the base are the persons who have no clients. Between these lowly clients and God there are many different ranks of patrons, each of whom has his own small pyramid of clients. They, in turn, are clients dependent upon other higher and more influential persons. The patrons of each rank form a group which asks favours from one another on behalf of their clients.

The intermediaries between man and God are the saints, who are closer to God than man is. A person who seeks to influence the decision of a higher authority similarly looks for a person who, by virtue of his kin relation or social position, is closer to the decision maker than he. In view of the functional similarity of saints to living patrons, it should not come as a surprise that the word for patron in Maltese is 'saint' (*qaddis*; plural *qaddisin*). Several proverbs underline the important role that patrons play in Maltese social life. Here are two: 'Without saints you can't get to heaven' (*Minghajr qaddisin ma titlax il-ġenna*); and 'You can do nothing without saints' (*Minghajr qaddisin ma taghmel xejn*). Another points to the fact that any patron-client relationship is not without obligation, even danger, for the client: 'He who fattens you will kill you' (*Min semmnek joqtlok*).

Who are these 'saints', these men of influence? For the most part they are people who have already been encountered, albeit in a slightly different capacity. They are the professionals, the civil servants and, in general, the wealthy and powerful. They are persons, respected for their education and social standing in the world outside the village, who can deal as equals with other important people and decision-makers, many of whom are their relatives and former classmates. Their patronage is sought by individuals and groups alike. They are often asked to become godparents, and they are called on to handle the ceremonial, business and political relations of clubs. They are also called on to help secure employment, building permits, hawkers licences or a long-delayed hearing at the law courts. Generally speaking, villagers choose patrons from the circle of influential people with whom they have the closest contact: the local professionals, the parish priest and clergy, the important landlords, all of whom command respect outside the village. Some clients are related to their

4: Cassar P-4, 5 (no date) 1964 EZ6 Malta EZ6

782 silver medal, seventeen "ex-votos" of silver, and £39 10s. 6d. in cash' (*Id-devota Maria*, 1894). In November 1961 twenty-two gold rings and thirty-one pairs of gold ear-rings, besides sums of money, were offered as 'ex-votos' at the shrine of St Rita at St Augustine's Priory, Valletta (*Santa Rita*, 1961, p. 192).

DISCUSSION

154 782 771 753 761 The relief of anxiety is one of the basic needs of the human personality. In a religion-conditioned community, such as that of the Maltese Islands, one of the most potent defence mechanisms against life-threatening situations consists in prayer and the offer of 'ex-votos' to the Godhead in order to receive deliverance in return. Perhaps what underlies this aspect of human behaviour is the idea that sickness and death are punitive measures from the Godhead for lapses committed by oneself, one's relatives, or one's community. As a matter of fact, the notion that illness is sent by God as a punishment for sins is still a current folk-belief in the Maltese Islands. The same trend of thought finds expression in certain depressive psychoses where the patient shows a heightened feeling of guilt and is convinced that divine wrath has been visited upon himself and his close relatives in the form of disease or death. It appears, therefore, that the 'ex-voto' is not a mere token of gratitude for a favour received but is also a propitiatory offering to appease the offended deity and thus obtain his pardon and the removal of the punishment. The element of sacrifice is implied in the self-denying act of surrendering a precious thing in return for recovery of health or rescue from imminent death, either materially in the shape of money or jewellery, or symbolically in the form of an anatomical representation of one's body. Whatever the psychological motivation prompting the offer of 'ex-votos', there is no doubt that they throw an illuminating sidelight on the part played by religious belief in the history of healing in the Maltese Islands since prehistoric times. They are also a testimony to the beneficial influence of religious *mores* (1) in satisfying the natural craving for security felt by the individual and by the community when faced with the crises of life, and (2) in maintaining morale and the will to live when the failure of medical skill tends to disorganize and destroy them. Indeed the 'ex-votos' reveal the story of the triumph of hope and faith over the trials and sufferings of countless generations of Maltese men and women who had found themselves beyond the help of contemporary science and of human assistance. It is needless to emphasize the recasting of Maltese religious beliefs after their conversion to Christianity in A.D. 60.

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[178] The change from paganism to Catholicism, coupled with technical and cultural developments, has brought about a parallel modification in the conventional form of the 'votiva'—from the baked clay image, the painted panel, and the wax and silver anatomical models to the exquisite examples of the jeweller's art; but the idea behind the changed outward sign remains immutable, i.e. the anxiety-relieving value of faith in a community where belief in an all-controlling God has, for thousands of years, been the pervasive character of the warp and woof of its cultural and psychological pattern.

[village of Gharghur]
[village of Zurrieq] 13.

36 include such atypically rural features as ground-floor windows[16]. In Mġarr the Church and the Jubilee Esplanade are at the centre of village organization with most of the shops, police station and dispensary close by, and through this central area pass the bus routes from Ghajn Tuffieha, to the north, and Mosta to the east. Gharghur, on the other hand, is a village of many centuries standing. Its morphology is as irregular as that of Mġarr is regular. As [491] one expects of a Maltese village the great Parish Church stands in the centre of the houses and the narrow streets - just as the Faith of the people stands in the centre of their life and work. The old streets of Gharghur grew up without any town-planning. Narrow alleys lead off to quiet courts; goat-pens, tiny shops and houses within yards of each other break the monotony of the streets in which few windows appear at ground-floor level[16]. First floor windows are seen, along with decorative balcony work and other embellishments of the yellow limestone walls. Map 6 distinguishes those parts of the village which have undergone new development, largely since 1945. The main part [491] of the work has been the cutting of a section of new road through old buildings between the Church and the recent [494] Government school. This road now carries the bus route from the Church square, the terminus, to Naxxar, and also houses the police station and the Government dispensary. Here then is the core area of the village (Map 6)

(i) a main street, carrying a regular bus route,
(ii) Church, police station, dispensary and school,
(iii) shops and bars nearby.

Turning again to Mġarr we now perceive the basic similarities of pattern (Maps 5 and 6).

In the case of ŻURRIEQ (Map 7) the same basic elements appear, though the built-up area of this village is much larger and there are additional, more urbanate, features. Bubaqra is an example of a dependent hamlet lacking the full complement of features of an independent village; it has no school, police station, etc. Żurrieq's morphological development follows the general pattern of the long-established Maltese villages with narrow, twisting streets and alleys delving seemingly at random into the built-up mass of houses, farm buildings, shops and work premises. The village is large enough to allow of secondary nuclei, particularly around churches or chapels, but the bulk of activity is focussed on the core area between Parish Church and School and in and near Churchill Square with its Band Club and Football Club premises, Lotto office[17], and shops.

as a means of escape (Section 1).

512 241 234 The nature of the farmer's daily timetable depends on
(a) the type of farm-unit involved,
(b) the labour force available,
(c) location,
(d) season.

The farmer's day begins, on average, between 4 a.m. and 4.30 a.m. Extremes are found in the case of herdsmen who often rise much earlier - at 2.30 a.m. in the case of the Gomitan with a large herd of cows and only a limited milking labour force, or after 5a.m. or 5.30 a.m. for a herdsman whose farm is close to an M.M.U. collection depôt. The M.M.U. require herdsmen to deliver their milk at such a depôt for transportation to the pasteurizing centre at Hamrun or, in Gozo (after 1958), to the new milk centre at Xewkija. Before this latter addition to the milk industry, which is expected to cope with all the Gozo-produced milk in both pasteurizing and other processes, it was possible for a herdsman (Case I) in north-western Gozo to have to rise as early as 12.30 a.m. Generally, in the summer, reveille for the field worker might be an hour or so earlier than in winter so that he and, even more, the herdsman might expect to begin most of his working days in darkness.

[771] The first event of the day for many country people is Mass. Some are regular attenders at one of the services between 4 and 6 a.m. Others, living further from a Church or having very heavy commitments of work, are less so. Field workers frequently take the Mass on their way to the work of the day (Case X).

[264] Breakfast is invariably a very light meal of little more than bread and tea or coffee. It is taken sometime between reveille and about 9 a.m. and does not constitute a major halt in the work of the farm. Milk producers in most cases do not breakfast until the animals are milked or even until they return with their carts from taking the churns to the M.M.U. collection depôt in the nearest village.

[264] [461] The main meal of the day is lunch, taken somewhere between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. and followed by a siesta of up to three hours. The herdsman's siesta is less flexible than that of the farmer for a 1 p.m. afternoon milking limits the time available. The milking over, the goat-herder takes his animals out to graze on a suitable patch of waste ground or stubble until 5 or 6 p.m. - or later in the summer (Case II). The milk is taken to the collection depôt with minimum loss of time especially in hot weather. In the case of the herdsman with cows there is clearly no question of grazing these animals (Case VI), except in one case (Case IX).

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

THE GAUGAU

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774 In "M. A. Vassalli's Dictionary" we read that:

Among the silly superstitions of the Maltese there still exists that which a human being can be changed or turned into a *Gaugau*.

Many women and children, therefore, believe that those who are born on Christmas Eve, just at the very time when our Lord was born, will continue until their death to be transformed into a ghost while asleep, every year just on Christmas eve. They then go out and wander about all over the Island frighting people with their groanings. After thus performing these ghostly pranks for some hours, these transformed creatures return home towards dawn quite exhausted, and awake in the morning quite unconscious of what had taken place during their nocturnal expedition.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

This yearly punishment is thought to have been inflicted, as our Saviour does not like any one to be born at the same time He was born!!

In order to give confirmation to this strange fancy, some of our silly females affirm that they frequently go in search of their husbands and children, and from midnight till about 4 a.m. they do not find them in the bed where they left them.

Others, who are still more superstitious, add to this foolish belief by saying that a person may get rid of this annual transformation by taking a sieve and spending from 11 o'clock at night till Christmas morning at dawn counting the holes.

We are unable to explain, goes on to say Vassalli, how this superstition got into the minds of our forefathers. We

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

771 794 192 only know that the word "Gaugau" is derived from the Syrian word *hagogo* which means a ghost and most probably was introduced here by the Phoenicians.

BOGEY-MAN

776 The ancient Maltese thought, and insisted upon others believing, that the Bogey-man wanders about our streets during the winter nights.

The Bogey-man is described as a hideous animal partaking of the nature of an ox, a ram and a donkey, going about until it comes to the first house which has been unfairly possessed, in order that with its hideous cries it might frighten the inmates.

Parents and nurses are still in the habit of frightening the little ones with the Bogey-man in order to induce them to go to sleep.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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'He is January's own brother, bless him,' said the poor man. 'Quantities of rain and everyone satisfied, for February fills up all and brings riches to the peasant's house. In the month of February all mistakes are discovered. In February sow, water, and tend the small-leaved basil.'

'What a lot you know!' they all cried.

'Friend,' said March, 'what about March?'

'Days long and beautiful,' answered the peasant. 'The cold braces you like iron, and a little wind is always desirable.'

The poor man answered in this way each question of the rest of the months, letting his tongue wag in their honour, praising each one up to the skies."

The merchant, in reply to the same set of questions, complains bitterly about each month. The peasant is given a magic cloth of the sort used to cover bread, which provides him and his family with food and drink in plenty. The rich merchant receives a stick which beats him and his wife unmercifully every time it is addressed.

824 787

Apart from the expected, usual characters of the twelve months, there is a method whereby the year's weather may be foretold. The twelve days preceding Christmas Eve are known as "presages." Each day foretells the weather of its corresponding month during the forthcoming year. Here, again, is seen the shadow of Mithra—the "Great Fecundator"—no period could be more ominous than the sacred twelve days preceding his feast.

FAITH

● 771 782

Where knowledge fails or some error in complying with the traditional rules is made, Faith steps in. A farmer will send for the village priest to bless his fields when he has sown

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

at the wrong season and so set right his error. The blessing is accompanied by the burning of leaves of the wild olive which have been blessed in Holy Week. Blessing, accompanied by sacred "fumigation," is very widely used—by fishermen to ensure a good catch, by newly married folk to ensure a happy house.

GETTING MARRIED

Zeppu and Grez will think long and seriously before they get married. In an island where poverty is the rule rather than the exception, and there is no "dole," there can be no haphazard mating. Zeppu will wait until he has a sufficient competence and Grez will contribute her share of the common resources in the form of a "dot" which she, herself, has earned and saved. Until very recently all marriages were arranged by a professional "go-between"—an old woman wise in the ways of the world and in suitable matings. Even now there is little choice left to the girl.

In this matter of marriage, so hedged about with Christian law and custom, the Old Things still command a place. Their hands are perhaps more apparent than in the marriage customs of all other countries—themselves pagan enough in origin.

In the story which has been quoted the month of February is praised, amongst other reasons, because it is then that the "small-leaved basil" is tended and watered. The reference might be rendered "In the Spring a young man's fancy . . ." for the sweet basil is the sign and symbol that a marriageable girl awaits a suitor.

The small bush, either of basil or of the Madonna rose, is carefully tended and placed on the sill of an upper window. A well-grown plant is an indication that the maiden will make a good wife and mother.

A suitor, seeing the "marriage bush" at an upper window,

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

174 584 825 which conferred on him "such Wisdom, Prowess, and good fortune . . . that Fame and Prosperity always attended him thereafter." Tennyson, describing his mystic Lady of the Lake, has:

> And o'er her breast floated the Sacred Fish.

The Saviour Himself was symbolized by the early Christians as a fish. Julius Africanus, an early Christian writer, said of Christ that He was the Great Fish, caught by the Hook of God, whose flesh nourishes the whole world.[1]

This bridal fish, then, may be in some sense a sacramental offering as well as a mere symbol.

584 789 828 The anointing of the bride's lips is yet another custom which, like the miniature "garden inclosed" of the marriageable girl, recalls the Canticle of Canticles:

> Thy lips my spouse are as a dropping honeycomb, honey and milk are under thy tongue. . . .[2]

585 174 The whole of this marriage ceremony is reminiscent of the old Fertility cults—the cakes, sweetmeats, nuts, grain, all in honour of the fertile Mother whose bountiful Earth is carried in a bowl bearing effigies of the bride and bridegroom whom it is hoped she will bless with her own fecundity and riches.

EVERYDAY HABITS

771 788 Grez, the housewife, will go about her daily tasks carefully following a thousand small rules, most of which have their English parallels. She will never cut a loaf without first making the Sign of the Cross on it with forefinger or knife. If the loaf falls to the ground, she will kiss it by way of asking pardon. She will not sweep her house after sunset for fear of [754] sweeping away good fortune. She will take care not to throw her "combings" out of doors. Should anyone wish her ill it

[1] *The Lost Language of Symbolism.* [2] *Song of Solomon*, IV, ii.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

will only be necessary for a "wise woman" or witch to spit on the hair while uttering a curse to bring misfortune upon the head which nourished it.

Grez will be careful not to laugh too heartily on a Friday—when the memory of the Crucifixion should make all sad. She will make the Sign of the Cross on leaving her house, on entering any vehicle or boat for no matter how short a journey, on cutting a piece of new cloth, before her baby's mouth when it yawns—so that evil spirits may not enter. On meeting a deformed or maimed person she will sign her corresponding limb or part of her body with the Cross.

When she brings flowers into her house she will be as careful to exclude the acacia as any West-country woman to avoid "may" or whitethorn, for the spiky Maltese acacia is the "thorn" of Palestine wherewith the Saviour was crowned.

These are but a few of the small ways in which the peasant woman pays a somewhat mixed homage to the Old Things as well as to the tenets of her Faith. In her favour it may be said that her "superstitions" are more logical than those of such folk who habitually "touch wood" or object to a third cigarette from one match.

THE FESTAS

The Festa, primarily a religious festival and a Holy Day of Obligation, provides the only relaxation for a hardworking and frugal people. Such simple pleasures as a meal of unaccustomed meat, a little wine, processions, and fireworks give full rein to the most lovable, childlike side of the national character. The importance attaching to these periodical holidays is well illustrated by an old rhyme:

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
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the relatives and the staining of the doors. Provision was made for the deceased's comfort in the other life by the breaking of his pottery—thus releasing the *manes* to accompany him in death.

The wake was a death feast originally designed to provide a sort of communion with the departed. Similarly, the cutting of the mourner's hair was intended to furnish a ritual link with the dead. Primitive tribes express the same idea in cannibalism and in funeral mutilations.

The cutting of the animals' tails was very probably a version of the sacrifice in expiation of the dead man's sins.

> ". . . Then they brought out a splendid white horse, and the priest cut some hair from its mane and tail and burned it on the altar, shouting 'A sacrifice!' . . . 'I saw poor Weland's face through the smoke, and I couldn't help laughing . . .' says Puck." [1]

Based on fear, as these "ancient fictions" were, they yet hid certain eternal truths.

The Old Things, with their complicated rituals, their theologies of terror, served their turn in leading mankind some distance on his upward march. Nowhere is their vague disembodied presence more felt than in Malta's rapidly dwindling countryside, where every stone may well have housed one of their altars. Not all of the Old Things were evil. The good ones have been adopted by Mother Church; but there remain those restless, evil ones who have never bowed down to the Nazarene. They hide in the shadows, angry and resentful.

THE HOUR OF THE OLD THINGS

Let us go out, at the third or fourth hour after midnight. Away from the clamorous ballrooms of the cramped city of

[1] *Puck of Pook's Hill.*